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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1968

VOL. 23, NO. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

DEATH IS MY MISTRESS

by BRETT HALLIDAY

She had left her home, her loved ones, and no one knew why. Was it a man? Fear of disgrace? Rebellion against a too possessive family? Whatever it was, one thing began to be obvious. Her only dowry, besides beauty, was—Murder. And Mike Shayne alone dared guess why.

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 23, No. 4, September, 1968. Published monthly by REKNOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. 56 W. 45th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) \$6.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1968, by REKNOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 56 W. 45th Street, New York, New York, 10036.

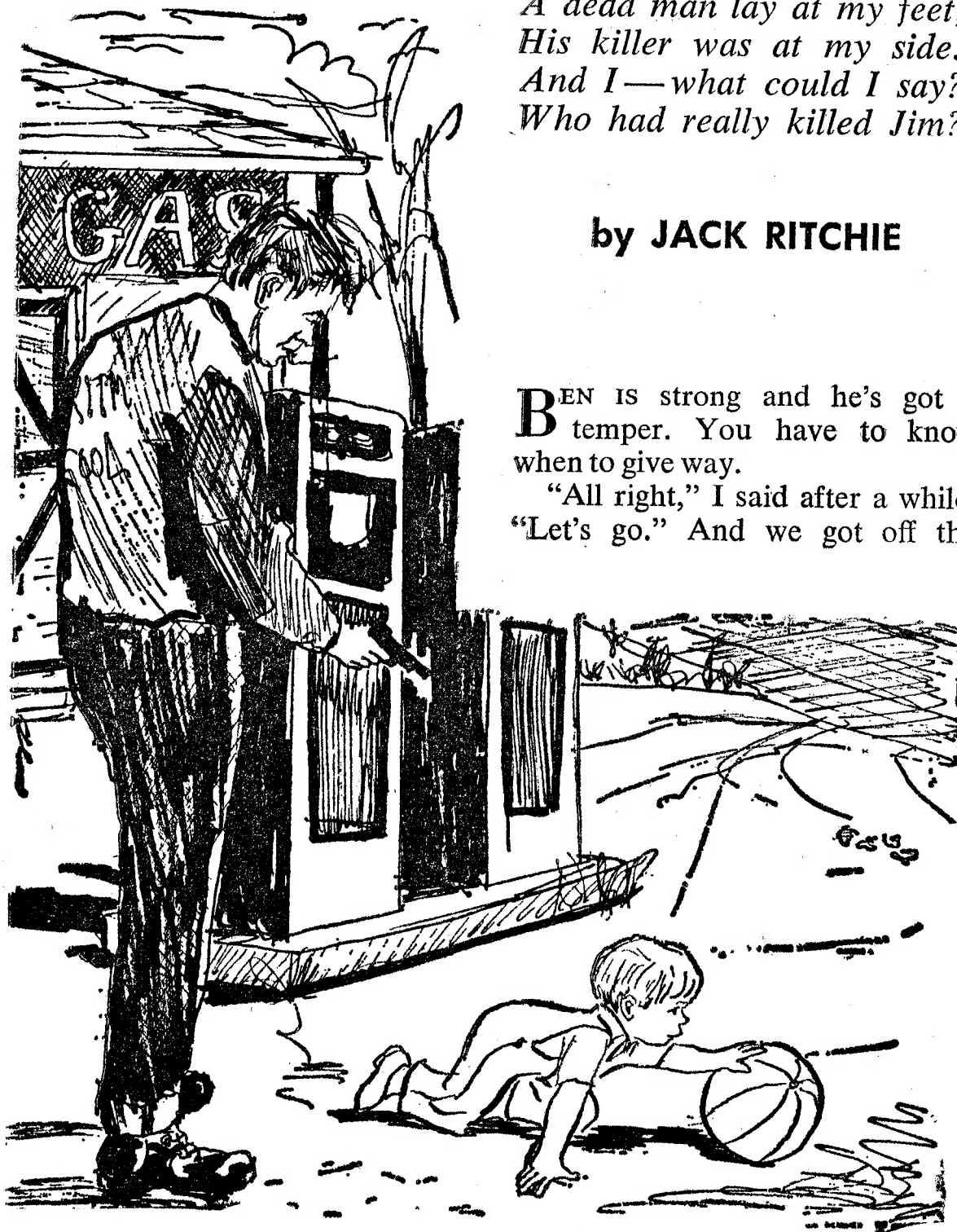
YOU GOT TO WATCH BEN

*A dead man lay at my feet,
His killer was at my side.
And I—what could I say?
Who had really killed Jim?*

by JACK RITCHIE

BEN IS strong and he's got a temper. You have to know when to give way.

"All right," I said after a while. "Let's go." And we got off the



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front steps and walked toward cousin Jim's service station down at the end of the block.

I watched Ben as we walked. You have to keep an eye on him. If you don't, it seems like anything he picks up breaks or bends.

Up ahead, I could see Jim sitting on the bench in the shade of the station. He was cleaning his pistol again.

Jim usually takes a long time between shaves, but he claims he's got the brains among all the kin.

He was married once, but it didn't take. I heard tell that he beat his wife. People say he's got a mean streak, but I didn't come across anything like that yet.

Jim saw us coming and slipped some cartridges into the gun.

He told me that he had bought the gun to protect himself in case of a robbery, but I think that he just likes to fool with guns.

When we walked up, Jim pointed the gun right at Ben's head.

Ben thought that was funny and he laughed.

I was a little nervous though. "That gun's got bullets in it."

Jim showed yellowish teeth. "Now would I point a loaded gun at a cousin?" Then he broke open the gun and looked surprised. "Well, doggone. How did those bullets get in there?" and he laughed.

A car pulled up beside the pumps and Jim put the gun in his pocket and walked over.

He gave the man two dollars worth of gas and went inside the station for change.

Jim rang up the money on the cash register and put the five dollar bill under the spring clip. He pulled out three ones, took some saving stamps out of the book, and went back out to the car.

Ben reached for the savings stamps.

"Stay away from those," I said.

Ben looked my way and the orange in his brown eyes seemed to flicker.

"Come on, Ben," I said easy. "Let's go back outside."

We went back to the bench and sat down. Jim came back after the customer left.

He reached for the can of beer on the window sill, took a big swallow, and put it back. He squinted some cigarette smoke out of his eye and took the gun out of his pocket.

He broke it open again and rapped cartridges into his palm. Then he handed the gun to Ben.

"Put the barrel up against your head, Ben," he said. "Pull the trigger. That's what they call Russian roulette."

Ben took the gun, but he didn't seem to know what Jim meant.

Another car pulled into the station. The customer got out and said, "Three bucks worth of regular," and then went inside the station to the lavatory.

Jim went to the pumps.

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Ben stared at the gun the way he does when he tries to figure out what something is.

I was afraid he might drop it. "Give me the gun, Ben."

The orange inside his eyes went on again and I knew he was going to be stubborn.

I grabbed the barrel of the gun and pulled.

The noise didn't seem loud, but it was sharp.

My heart stopped for a second and I thought that the bullet might have hit me. But then it started beating again and I knew I wasn't hurt.

I turned and saw Jim standing at the rear of the customer's car. Just standing there stiff, his back toward us.

I noticed the small hole in the back of his jacket, but the blood didn't come from there. It came from the bottom of his jacket.

And then suddenly he dropped.

I looked back at Ben. His mouth was open like he didn't understand what had happened.

The door of the station opened and the customer's eyes got wide when he saw Jim on the cement. "What happened?"

"It was an accident," I said.

The customer looked at Jim's body once more and then went back inside to the phone.

The first squad car came in just a couple of minutes, its light flashing, and then there were more.

I began to think hard about

what had happened. Would the police believe it was really an accident? And even if they did, what would they do to somebody like Ben? Did they have a special place where they would be kind to him?

One of the policemen took out a notebook. "Tell me about it."

I took a deep breath. "I'm the one who did it. I was holding the gun and I thought it was unloaded. I saw Jim take out the bullets, but I guess he forgot to count them."

They asked me more questions and I finally thought they were through, but then one of them came to the station from a house across the street.

"We got an eye witness," he said. "Lady across the street. About seventy or so and spends her time in a wheelchair on that screened porch." He looked at me. "It was an accident, all right, but not quite the way you tell it."

After supper I went out and sat on the front steps. I watched a woman get off at the bus stop.

She stopped in front of me. "Can you tell me where the Johnsons live?"

I nodded. "Right across the street. The white house."

She thanked me. "I suppose you go to school?"

I felt kind of proud. "I'm already in the fourth grade." I pointed to where Ben played with his fire engine in the dirt. "But my brother's nearly three and he can't even talk good yet."